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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

The world is beset by major conflicts and violence: wars, riots, crime and general disorder. Terrorism adds a nuclear threat. Some roots of all this can be found in extreme poverty. Respect for human rights and the provision of associated social development are often powerful antidotes of such disorders, contributing to the health of society and real security.

It is no accident that the majority of persons in the world's prisons are persons who had been living in poverty. Frustration, anger and desperation, stimulated by living in extreme poverty, motivate violent and unlawful actions. We note that security is enhanced when former warriors and former offenders are given the benefits of social development. Thus, cooperative social development programmes that empower those living in poverty can both help to prevent violence and to restore society to health following violence. It offers the possibility of a win-win solution to conflict.

Some of the key social development antidotes to extreme poverty are a social protection floor; decent work; and social services. Needed social services include quality programmes in health, education and criminal justice. Programmes to enable all people to have a voice to participate in the social, economic, environmental and political life of the neighbourhood, local government and national Government are imperative.

Social protection floor

Everyone should be able to access at least basic health, primary education, housing, water, sanitation and other essential services. The social protection floor, sponsored by the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization, is a key vehicle.

Health

Health includes combating diseases such as AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, which particularly affect those living in poverty, by implementing the necessary immunization, education and other programmes, and by training health practitioners to identify and treat such illnesses. Often neglected, is the provision of treatments for drug addiction and for those who are mentally ill, which can be major problems among those living in poverty.

Education

Since the most important factor in improving basic education and literacy levels is ensuring that teachers are properly trained, motivated and supervised, care for the training and compensation of teachers are of first importance.

Job training aimed at decent work in productive areas that are known to need skilled workers should be a high priority. Training in small business management and microfinance are valuable additions to empower new business capability.

Criminal justice

We recommend that States expand justice systems, including mediation and other non-formal dispute resolution mechanisms, in accordance with human rights

standards. We further recommend use of restorative justice approaches and community service to restore harmony within the community as opposed to incarceration as punishment by the justice system.

The family is the core unit of society; hence, violence within the family is particularly destructive. The legal rights of women and children must be clear and unambiguous. Laws against domestic violence must be fully enforced, bearing in mind that restorative practices, education and counselling are appropriate in these cases.

Particular attention is needed to reduce the numbers of persons held in pretrial detention. We recommend legislation to limit pretrial detention that is without an appropriate hearing to less than one month.

We recommend adoption by the General Assembly of, and adherence by all Member States to, the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, augmented by the addition of rules for the treatment of women prisoners.

We recommend that justice and prison systems further organize and support, as a primary and priority function, programmes to rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders as contributing members of society.

Violence breeds violence. Our prisons reflect our ethical level and neglect of human rights. They reflect values of retribution and retaliation. An ethical and non-violent world should have ethical prisons. Changing human behaviour in prison situations would be the start to making a significant change in community values that could eventually transform the world.

Note: The statement endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Carmelite NGO, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul and Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.